CHAPTER XIV

SUPERNATURAL GIFTS

SEERS OR SORCERERS

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●756 Among the Bedouins there are persons, both male and female, who know and see hidden things and are able to heal the sick. The Rwala call them collectively *ahl as-sirr* or *as-serrijje*, and individually *râ' as-sirr*, a lord (or owner) of secrets, seer, whereas they are known among themselves as *aṣḥâb al-islâm*, owners of *islâm*, possessing the protection of God. They maintain that they inherit their supernatural qualities, their *islâm*, from their forefathers and that, therefore, the ability to heal the sick, discover what is hidden, foretell the future, etc., is confined to certain families. This the Rwala refuse to believe and often deride the seers openly. If, however, both the seer's father and grandfather were also known as seers or sorcerers, then the Bedouins may admit the claim to be justified; but they scoff the more at the men and women who, having joined the seer, begin after some time to claim that they too have been endowed by Allâh with the gifts of *islâm*.

The seer maintains that he communicates with an angel, *malak*, who announces to him the will of Allâh. Such an angel, an intermediary between Allâh and the sorcerer, is called *munâbi* or *mnâbi*, spokesman. As a rule the *munâbi* appears in the shape of a rider seated on a white mare. He tells the seer what to proclaim in Allâh's name, and woe to him should he say something different from what the angel told him, *mâ jeḥči kowd ḥači al-malak*, for the angel would kill him on the spot. The *munâbi* simply says: "O So-and-So, this or that is going to happen; this or that thou wilt proclaim; this or that do!" Besides the angel the seer's ancestors also appear to him in the night between Thursday and Friday, instructing him how to behave. Yet neither the angel nor the ancestors ever appear without a thorough preparation on the part of the seer.

Every seer has his disciples, *ṭallâbt as-sirr*, who are taught all the external performances necessary to display if

791 the *munâbi* is to appear. They come to the seer on Thursday
●756 night, accompany him on his visits to the sick and on raids, and join him whenever he commands them. One part of their duty is to carry little drums and other musical instruments,
[789] *dfûf w-šiš* or *dirbâš*. If the sorcerer wants to call the spokesman-angel to him, he beckons to the disciples to play, while he himself squats with his head bent down. After a while he begins to move, stands up, stretches out his hands, jumps about, contorts his body, and puts his hands, feet, and even his head close to the fire, clapping his hands. The Bedouins say of this that he is just playing, *jel'ab*, but his disciples call it yielding to the influence of the *islâm*, ecstasy. When his enthusiasm reaches its climax, either Allâh's spokesman or some of the seer's ancestors appear on the scene. After the climax has subsided, the seer, greatly exhausted, complains that he can do nothing. The Bedouins, however, who cannot be made to believe that this ecstasy is a mere preparation for the angel's appearance, deride the sorcerer, imitate his gestures, and call him one possessed and a juggler. Especially those of the new sorcerers whose ancestors were not known as seers are the target of their ridicule when trying to establish themselves. In this the Rwala are assisted by the acknowledged seers themselves, even by the new seer's temporary master. The new sorcerer is called *marši*, a fool; *masdûf*, bereft of reason; *ǧabel*, feeble-minded; *wâše'eh kejfarân*, full of unbelief; *maṣfûḥ*, drunk; *ma'rûṣ*, one possessed, etc. Should he declare something as the will of Allâh, all will laugh at him, for he could not learn anything from his ancestors who were not seers themselves, and the speaking angel does not know him. Yet even if, after all, he achieves something extraordinary, they say he was helped by some spirit, *ǧânn*, and with such the sorcerers never associate.
[555] However, by perseverance, patience, and courage a sorcerer-to-be in a few years will gain recognition not only from the Bedouins but from the hereditary sorcerers as well. The advance of such a sorcerer's son in his father's calling is, as a matter of course, much easier and speedier.

791 In defense of their honor the seers sometimes resort to
754 curses. They are unable by their own strength to ruin the scoffers, but their ancestors and the spokesman-angel with whom they communicate will ask Allâh to punish those who dare to persecute them. These will die prematurely, their sons